

*A good Conscience and a lively Hope the great
Support and Comfort at Death.*

1 B. 3.
A
S E R M O N

Preached at

Dorking-Surrey,

February 11, 1749.

On Occasion of the

D E A T H

Of the REVEREND

Mr. Thomas Coad.

K
By JOHN MILNER, D. D.

Conscientia bene actae vitae, multorumque beneficiorum recordatio, jucundissima est. Cic. de Senect. 3.

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II TIM. iv. 7, 8.

I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the Faith.

Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also, that love his appearing.

IF we believe, what we naturally hope, that we shall survive the ruins of death; if we believe, what we constantly see, that Mankind is flowing in successive generations into this new state of existence; and that we ourselves mingle with the passing throng: nothing can be more reasonable, on such principles, than to enter frequently into the views of Futurity; than to form our lives upon this extensive plan, and act up to the hopes of immortality.

When death is the subject, the immediate view of the funeral rites may strike a deep impression into the mind.—The solemn toll—

the slow pace of grief — the sable dress of mourning — the tender sigh and falling tear — an open grave scattered with the remains of the past generation, are circumstances which naturally give the mind a serious turn; and make levity itself look demure. But rational creatures should be rather instructed and determined by their reason, than by their passions. The certainty and importance of our own death should as effectually move and engage us, as if imagination had drawn the mournful Scene; and the view of it in others should teach us to number our days, so as to apply our hearts to wisdom^a.

When the Death of a Minister is the subject, religion as well as humanity concur to raise the measure of our grief. When such a one dies, we lose not only a friend, but instructor; one whose life and labours were devoted to serve our best interests. This makes the subject of death still more interesting, and should be considered as a particular call of providence to improve the sad event.

This, my Friends, at present is your case.— Your Pastor, whom I have long known, an honest, faithful Minister of Jesus Christ, is removed after a short trial of his endeavours amongst you *. A lingering, painful Sickness, which he bore with great patience and submission, concluded his life and work. He is gone to give up his account, and it is a proper time for you to consider of your own, that your meeting together in the great day of the Lord, might

^a Psalm xc. 12.

* About three Years.

might be to your mutual comfort and joy. He has restrained me from speaking of him in those terms of respect, which I should be otherwise inclined to do. His desire was that his death might be improved, but that his character should be referred to the Judgment-day, when, free from the partiality of friendship, or the censure of ill-will, it would appear without disguise.

However I may be allowed to offer the character of St. *Paul* in the close of his ministry and life. A character, which I doubt not, but every faithful Minister would imitate; without pretending to reach the height of his zeal, or the abundance of his labours and success. We may consider the passage, I have read, not only as delivered by an Apostle, but a Christian. It contains a character, which every good man should aim at for his own. It is no other than, upon a review of life, to be able to rejoice in the testimony of a good conscience, and the expectations of a lively hope. *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course; I have kept the faith*—Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me in that day, and not to me only; but unto all them also, that love his appearing. The blessedness, you see by the last clause, is referred to all good Christians, and we may without violence apply the other part to them: the one as the subject of their duty, the other as the object of their hope.

The Apostle had a near prospect of death. *I am now ready to be offered, or to be made a sacrifice*

crifice of, and the time of my departure is at hand^b. He did not say this from any experience of a dangerous sickness; or the infirmities of old age: but from what he foresaw would very likely befall him in his present circumstances. He was now imprisoned, deserted by his friends, persecuted by his enemies; and to be judged very soon by that cruel Emperor, Nero. This is the person, which he is supposed to mean by the *Lion* afterwards^c; from whom he was happily delivered at his first hearing, but he had no hopes of escaping at the second, which was not far off.

In this situation, as he stood on the verge of life, he takes a view of both worlds, and finds a fair encouraging prospect either way. He looked to what was past, and his conscience bore him this testimony; *I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith.* He looked to what was to come, and he felt the joyful hope and expectation of blessedness, *henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me, &c.*—In the words we have these two parts, *viz.*

I.... *The account which the Apostle gives of his past life.*

II.... *The hope and expectation which he expresses of future blessedness.*

Both

^b ver. 6.

^c ver. 17.

Both parts are inseparably connected by the Will of God, as well as by the reason and fitness of things. Without endeavouring the former, we can have no reasonable hope of enjoying the latter. Without the one we shall have no title or disposition for the other. They are both necessary to render death, if not more amiable, yet certainly less dreadful. The greatness of the hope will be a good counterpoise to the distress of our fears; and the pleasure of what we believe, will lessen the pain of what we feel.—I shall consider both parts distinctly, and then conclude with some useful reflections.

I.... You will observe the account which the Apostle gives of his past life. *I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith.* The Apostle undoubtedly alludes here to those *Gymnastick Exercises*, so famous in all *Greece*, celebrated first at *Olympia*, near the city *Elis* in the *Peloponnesus*, now called *Morea*: from whence they were called *Olympick games*. We have a distinct account of this affair by a learned and able hand^a: some notion of which will be requisite for understanding the propriety and force of the Apostle's expressions.

The

^a *Vid. West's Pindar; to which is prefixed a large dissertation on the Olympick Games.*

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" The exercises or contentions used on those occasions, every fifth year, were *running*, *leaping*, *wrestling*, *borge* and *chariot-racing*, &c. which engaged the principal men of Greece in a competition of honour, and drew a vast concourse of people together.—The combatants prepared themselves for those trials of manhood with great temperance and application. They were obliged to appear at the city *Elis* thirty days at least before the celebration of the games. Here they exercised themselves every day, sometimes an whole day without intermission, with the utmost trial of their patience and fortitude. And, before this, they exercised themselves nine months in the schools of their own town or country.—There was also a *Judge* or president appointed, to whom it belonged to enquire into the character of the Candidates, viz. whether they were freemen, and *Grecians*; and clear from all infamous and immoral stains: to enquire into their qualifications according to the order prescribed for those exercises, viz. whether they had entered their names in time, and duly prepared themselves answerable to the dignity of those solemnities. It was also his business, and those who assisted him to decide any differences, which might arise on those occasions; and finally to declare, who were the persons to be proclaimed victors by the Heralds.—The reward given by the Judge was a *crown* composed of the branches of a wild Olive, for the head; and a branch of

Palm-

the great Support in Death. 9

"Palm-tree, for the hand. Those were public testimonies of the victor's worth and merit, and followed by the acclamations of that numerous Assembly, and the congratulations of particular friends. Sometimes amidst their friends they returned to their own country in a kind of triumph, enjoyed great privileges and immunities, and were ever afterwards held in great honour."

To those exercises the Apostle alludes in many passages of his Epistles, and particularly in the text, as appears from the *race*, or *course*, *the judge and the crown*. The word translated *fight* ^f, is applicable to any of those exercises, and the clause, *I have fought a good fight*, might more properly be rendered, *I have engaged or exerted myself in a good exercise*. Thus he speaks of a steady application to virtue and religion, *exercise thyself to godliness* ^g. By using this agonistical expression he would inform us, that by our own vigorous endeavours, in dependance upon divine assistance, and in conformity to the rules of the gospel, which contains the laws of our Christian exercise, we must secure the prize, the crown of immortality and blessedness. Upon a recollection of things the Apostle's conscience bore this testimony, that he had done so. And sad will it be for every one of us, if when we come to die, we cannot say the same, *that we have exerted ourselves in a good exercise, that we have finished our course, and kept the faith.*

B

— There

^e Δρόμοι.

^f Αγῶνα.

^g Γέμωντες, 1 Tim. vi. 7.

— There are three things which his conscience witnessed in regard to religion, viz.

His choice.

His constancy.

His fidelity.

FIRST.... His choice ; *I have engaged or exerted myself in a good exercise.* This contains his approbation of religion, notwithstanding the difficulties and labours, which attended it. And indeed there is no design so excellent, useful, and necessary ; and in all views so worthy our choice and esteem, as religion. It would carry us to the highest improvement of nature, and to the noblest possession of happiness.

If to know God, in his perfections and providence is excellent ; if to know the treasures of his covenant, and the methods, which his goodness has pursued in all ages for the relief and comfort of mankind, and discovered, with surprizing fulness and glory, in sending his son to be our guide and saviour ; if to be delivered from the confusion of superstition and error, from the prejudices of sense, and the power of corrupt examples and customs, be excellent, the records of our religion discover those things ; divine and glorious truths, the foundation of moral agency, and the source of eternal life. *This is life eternal to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent*^h.

If

* John xvii. 3.

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If to be interested in the virtue and power of this merciful constitution be more excellent than the mere knowledge of it. To be delivered from two of the greatest Evils which can possibly affect us, *viz.* Sin and death. From sin by the assurance of a pardon to the sincere penitent; from death, by the promise of a glorious resurrection to the truly pious. To be adorned with all the virtues of religion, which render us pleasing to God, and useful to our fellow-creatures. To be able to subdue our appetites, and govern our passions, and in consequence of this be consistent with ourselves, and act in proportion to the ends of our Being. To have the witness within, that we are forming into a divine temper; and taste the exalted pleasures of piety and benevolence. To have nothing to fear from the displeasure of God, rather to believe that we are guided by his wisdom, and surrounded by his power, as a shield. How excellent and amiable a character is this? How honourable; how satisfying are all the productions of real religion in the soul!

There can, *certainly*, be no design to engage us comparable to this. The projects of wealth, dominion and glory, are mean things in the comparison: circumscribed by narrow limits, and often embittered with painful reflections. The most sensual paradise is a barren waste to this, and produces no such flagrant flowers. What avails it in those circumstances to pamper the body and starve the mind? Or, as is generally the case of abandoned sensualists, to sink

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in the understanding, as they enlarge their carnal pleasures? See how dishonourable, how absurd, how base it is to make reason an instrument to serve those lusts, it was designed to controul, and abominate.

It was not then without reason, that the Apostle called religion *a good exercise*. It is the wisest and the best choice we can possibly make for ourselves. It is *a good part that shall never be taken from us*¹. Let difficulties and labours be supposed to attend it, it is nevertheless preferable to every other choice. It brings with it a good, that will recompence all our pains; it opens in the pious breast a spring of habitual comfort; and will end at last in a perfection of happiness.

There is one thing, shews it to be our best choice, that when men come to die, and make a truer judgment of things, they generally are of this mind. Did you never stand by the bedside of dying persons? What has been the concern and grief of some? What so much as this, that they have neglected religion, offended their creator, and despised the counsels of wisdom? Oh the pain and torture of that thought! What has been the occasion of composure and resignation in others? Was it not the approbation of their consciences? They made religion their care, and now it was their comfort. How reviving a reflection in the last extremity of nature! "All my life past, *I have been engaged in a good exercise*. I have endeavoured to

" please

¹ Luke x. 42.

" please my Creator; to answer the ends of
" my being, and render myself useful in every
" station. For this I have postponed every o-
" ther interest; for this I have endured both
" censure and Sufferings; and now, upon a re-
" view, I see no reason to be dissatisfied with
" what I have chosen, only to be humbled
" that I pursued it with no more delight and
" zeal. This is my comfort, which outlives
" all other comforts, and what I would not
" part with now to gain a world."

SECONDLY.... You may observe his con-
stancy. *I have finished my course*, i. e. "I have
" persevered in it, notwithstanding the inter-
" ruptions and difficulties I met with. No dis-
" couragements could abate my zeal, or alter
" my purpose. Still I persisted in my choice
" and *ran with patience the race that is set be-*
" *fore me*^k". This perseverance is no more
than necessary in a christian. A course of vir-
tue is certainly amiable and excellent; but then
it is difficult, and will require our utmost at-
tention and care. We must expect opposition
both from within, and without: *within*, from
the conflicts and struggles of corrupt nature;
without, if not from the fear of persecution,
yet from the number and power of dangerous
temptations.

Let a man try the experiment, and set him-
self in earnest to become good, and he will find
a strange relunctancy from the instincts and pa-
fions

^k Heb. xii. 1.

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sions of animal nature. He must use all his caution and courage to avoid the deceitfulness of sin, and keep himself unspotted from the world¹. He must strive against the powerful stream of example and custom, and do one of the hardest things in the world, deny himself.

It is not enough that a man runs well for the present, unless he runs on: because the same reasons which induce us to begin, equally engage us to continue in a good way; and that which looked amiable at first, will be much improved by practice, so run that ye may obtain^m. The scripture every where insists upon this constancy as our duty. As the race was to be finished, before the crown could be claimed; so the Christian must persevere and hold on to the end of life. We are then only made partakers of Christ, when we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the endⁿ. It is by a patient continuance in well doing that we must arrive to eternal life^o. Our Saviour does not hide any difficulty from his friends, and therefore justly expects that when they have set their hands to the plough, they should not draw back. Such as, through indolence or fear, deserted so noble a cause, or shewed an inclination to a different course, are not far from betraying the interest of God and their souls, and therefore pronounced by our Saviour, not fit for the kingdom of God^p.

But

¹ Jam. i. 27. ^m 1 Cor. ix. 24. ⁿ Heb. iii. 14.
• Rom. ii. 7. ^p Luke ix. 62.

But then though religion requires all our strength and zeal, we are not to strive alone; but are to depend upon the aids and comforts of religion; upon that *strength which will be made perfect in our weakness*⁴. And how pleasing must it be to us, as it was to the Apostle, to end our work and life together. “*I have finished my course, I have persisted in my proper duty to the best of my capacity all my life. No day that passed but was a witness to my piety and prayer: in the morning to express my gratitude, in the evening my dependence upon heaven. It was the pleasure of my life to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with my God.*” Such a testimony of conscience will revive more than all the cordials of nature, and leave a smile upon the countenance in the midst of paleness and horror.

THIRDLY.... You see here his integrity and faithfulness, *I have kept the faith.* By his keeping the faith, he does not mean that his notions were always right; for though this be an important duty, and which every lover of truth will prize: yet this is a partial character, and may be separate from any moral and virtuous influence, *There is an holding the truth in unrighteousness*⁵. There may be a knowing head, where there is a corrupt and rotten heart; an eloquent tongue and a fine address, where there is a secret prostitution of conscience and virtue.

The

The Apostle intends a more universal character of goodness, namely, his integrity and uprightness. *He had kept the faith*, i. e. according to the true meaning of the expression ; he had been true to his profession, faithful to his master, and sincere in his duty. He may be supposed to allude to the forementioned exercises, and the oath which the candidates took, that they had duly prepared themselves, and would observe the laws of exercise ^s. *If a man strive for the mastery, he is not crowned, except he strive lawfully* ^t.

The Christian must expect the immortal crown on the terms settled by Christ himself, in this persuasion, *That no other foundation can be laid, than that which is laid, even Christ Jesus the Lord* ^w. No temptations must ever warp him from his duty ; none of the deceits of sin and the world, ever draw him to unfaithfulness or hypocrisy. He should always desire and endeavour to be what he ought to be, i. e. be sincere. This is an amiable and universal principle of religion, and of the greatest value in the sight of God. God has no where promised his presence and favour to persons, merely because they are rich and powerful, of great parts and learning ; but he has promised them to men of uprightness

^s Τηρεῖν τὸν ὕστερον, in the Greek, and *servare fidem* in the Latin, signify to keep ones word or promise ; to be trusty and faithful. Polyb. *passim*. Cic. Orat. in Vatin. 6. Ter. Hecyr. 3. 3. 42.

^t Vid. West's Dissertation, &c. Sect. xv.

^u 2 Tim. ii. 5.

^w 1 Cor. iii. 11.

rightness and integrity, whatever their station or rank may be.

This is a character so essential to all religion, that it ought to be clearly understood by us. It lies in this, *right and good intentions accompanying all the actions of our lives.* — Our intentions are the views and designs we propose to ourselves in action.—They are right and good, when they are directed by a prevailing reverence and love of God; by the great ends of our being; by real benevolence to our fellow-creatures; and an hearty concern to promote truth, peace, equity and order in the world.—When such intentions prevail and govern us, though possibly mingled with some weaknesses, frailties, and mistakes, they are, in an evangelical sense, right. The man *then* is sincere and upright, when he bares a constant and unalterable regard to the great principles of truth, virtue and happiness, so far as they are known to him.

“ Pause here a little, *O my soul,* and recollect whether such have been thy views, in the services of religion; in thy friendships and relations, thy dealings and commerce with mankind. Or have interest, ambition and appearances only been regarded. Thou canst resolve this question to thyself, and judge of the morality of thy past conduct. Methinks as I am viewing things in this light, nothing so contemptible as the civil compliment, the polite address, the noisy zeal, the officious friendship, the flowing tongue, the artful scheme, that is destitute of integrity, and

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" rectitude of intentions. Oh what will be
" more surprizing in the last and great day of
" the Lord, than an exchange of characters,
" different from what they are here; when all
" disguises will be pulled off, and every thing
" appear in its just proportion and reality."

Let the reflection engage us to be the same persons now, and then; to be sincere in all we speak or act: or to express it more emphatically in the language of the Apostle, *to exercise ourselves to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men*^x. In such a disposition we shall constantly lean to the interests of truth, virtue and religion, without wishing them different from what they are. Thus, for instance, *repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ* are given us, as the sum of the Gospel^y. An honest, upright Christian will pay a regard to the importance of this passage; be truly sorry for his offences, and honour the Saviour by a cheerful dependence and trust. Holiness and virtue are made expressly necessary to our hope of heaven. *Follow holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord*^z. The sincere Christian, who would not be deceived, will cultivate the moral temper; the natural element of happiness here, and the express condition of enjoying the improvements of it above. He will admit nothing to corrupt so plain a truth, or be admitted as an equivalent, to keep up his hope of heaven. The terms

^x Acts xxiv. 16.

^y Heb. xii. 14.

^z Acts xx. 21.

terms of acceptance, as settled by Christ he receives, he is thankful for, and pursues in all the forms of religion.

Such an integrity has for its companion a sense of divine favour. And in this connection ministers the noblest pleasure both in life and death. When stern death looks us in the face, and all help is far from us, how reviving to be able to say, “*I have kept the faith.*” “*I have been faithful and sincere in the fight of God.* It has been my chief care to please him, though attended with much infirmity.” “*It has been my greatest pleasure to do his will and secure his favour.* And now I am “*going into an untried State, I have nothing to fear from his power.* I have every thing to expect from his goodness, his promise, his covenant; from that word in which he has caused me to hope. And now, *O Father of mercies, and God of grace,* into thy hands I commend my Spirit:”—I proceed

II... To consider the Apostle's hope and expectation of future blessedness. *Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.* Allusive still to the *gymnastick exercises*, where there was a judge; and to excite the emulation of the competitors, there were placed in view on tables, the object

of their ambition, the olive crowns ^a. In the Christian race observe

*The Reward.
The Rewarder.
And the Time.*

FIRST... Observe the reward. *Henceforth*, i. e. having finished a successful course of faith and virtue, I have no more difficulties to struggle with, nothing to do, but enjoy the reward, eminently styled Salvation and eternal life. *There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.*

A crown was given the Olympick victors, and a crown will grace the superior faith and virtues of a Christian. But with this noble difference; *the one was a leafy corruptible crown: the other incorruptible* ^b; the one was of merit, and therefore, amongst the several competitors in each exercise, only one could receive it. *They that run in a race, run all, but one receiveth the prize* ^c. But the christian crown is of free gift, which every sincere and virtuous believer may hope to enjoy. *Which the Lord the righteous judge shall give, not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.* Thus the excellency and glory of the life to come is set forth.— It is a crown to denote VICTORY. In the last day, sin and death will lie vanquished at the Christian's feet, and this the publick testimony of his triumph, *O death where is thy sting; O grave*

^a West's Dissertation, &c. Sect. xvi.

^b 1 Cor. ix. 25.

^c Ib. vers. 24.

grave where is thy victory ! Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ ^d.—It is a crown to denote FELICITY. And how great must that be, which results from a rectitude and perfection of our faculties ; from a constant imitation of God, and free communications from his goodness ; from the increasing treasures of knowledge, and raptures of praise.

It is *a Crown of righteousness*, expressive of the divine GOODNESS, benignity and favour, in delivering those, who receive it, from sin and temptation ; from pain, suffering, and death. Thus righteous and merciful is God ; thus faithful is the donor of this crown, not one of his promises has failed. *He is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love* ^e. *We through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness*, or Salvation, by faith ^f.—It is a crown of righteousness, respective to the MORAL TEMPER of the receiver, *for he that doth righteousness is righteous* ^g. The reward will be in proportion to the nature and quality of our actions. Not only will virtue be rewarded, but be a part of the reward itself. It is a virtuous happiness that the Christian will enjoy : *for every one must receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done* ^h. The Christian's crown will be the token of his new nature, and the emblem of his integrity.

How

^a 1 Cor. xv. 55, 57.
^b Gal. v. 5.

^c Heb. vi. 10.
^d 1 John iii. 7.
^e 2 Cor. v. 10.

How great the reward; what a lustre in this crown! *Thou Lord will bless the righteous*ⁱ. Happy those who have done with sin and sorrow; who have quitted our weeping world! “Methinks yonder they sit in garments of the purest light. They smile upon us, and say, “*come up hither*. See how they wave their palms, and point to their glittering crowns and robes, to animate us in our course, and inspire us with courage and constancy.” *Be thou faithful to the death, and I will give thee the crown of life*^k.

SECONDLY.... You will observe the rewarder. *Which (crown) the Lord the righteous judge shall give me.* There was a judge at the Olympick games to give the sentence; and allot the crown to the victors. The Lord Jesus Christ is our appointed Judge; and every way qualified for such an office. *All power is given him in heaven and earth*^l; and his throne commands an universal prospect. He observes the several racers here: who they are, that push on with vigour and resolution; and who, sink into indolence, ease and pleasure, and foolishly prefer them to a Crown of immortality.

He is the righteous judge, i. e. good, merciful, the author of Salvation. *This is his name whereby he shall be called, the Lord our righteousness*, i. e. Salvation^m. It is a constitution of mercy, that we are under, of which he is the life

ⁱ Psal. v. 10. ^k Rev. ii. 10. ^l Matt. xxviii. 18.
^m Jer. xxiii. 6. Heb. v. 9.

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life and head. Now it will appear eminently such, when Christ will give a reward so much beyond the proportion of the service; or the desert of the victors. Religion brings with it so many advantages, as to make it our present interest; how much greater must it appear, when it shall be crowned with eternal life? — *He is the righteous Judge, i. e. just and equitable. He will judge the world in righteousness, by that man, whom he hath ordained*^o. No partial respects will affect this judgment-seat. The scrutiny will be exact; the evidence full and clear; and the sentence impartial. There will be no escaping; no disguising at this great assize. *We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ*^o.

I am thinking how it will add to the pleasure of receiving this crown, that it will come with the heart, which once glowed with kind and generous passions towards sinners: and from those very hands, which were once nailed to the cross. Christ, the judge, is now the engaging object of the Christian's love, and then he will receive the crown from him, as the pledge of an immortal friendship.

THIRDLY.... You will observe the time, the happy season when this crown will be given, viz. *at his appearing*. This was spoken of before, *I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead*
at

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at his appearing and kingdom ^p. Then, when the judgment of the whole world will commence, and Christ will appear in all his royalty and glory, then will the crown be received. That great, important day, which will be ushered in with the utmost solemnity. All nature in consternation and agony, Angel-Heralds opening the scene; the trump of God awaking the dead, all the tribes of men crowding, with different passions, into one assembly; that is the time fixed for their coronation. That notable day of the Lord, when he will appear, to the terror of some, *in flaming fire taking vengeance* on the disobedient: to the joy of others, *to be glorified in his Saints and admired in all them that believe* ^q.

Then, when the wicked shall be thrust into darkness and misery; and receive the dreadful recompence of those sins, which no warnings, no interest, or even experience could keep them from; then will he put the crown upon the heads of the virtuous and good, saying, *Come ye blessed of my Father inherit the kingdom prepared for you* ^r. Then will he own them, in the most publick manner, as his friends; then direct them to mingle with his shining train, that with their crowns on their heads, they might in one full chorus shout his return to glory. *So shall they be ever with the Lord* ^s, in consummate bliss.

It

^p ver. 1. ^q 2 Thess. i. 8. ^r Matt. xxv. 34.
^s 1 Thess. iv. 17.

It must certainly add to the joys of this day, that all other good Christians will share in the honours of it *which he will give not to me only, but unto all them also, who love his appearing;* who were engaged in the same cause of real religion, and waited for the coming of Christ. Here, I know not how, the friends of religion live too much strangers to one another; and are ready to shut up the kingdom of heaven with the private key of opinions and forms, which they would have in their own keeping. Hereafter they will know and rejoice, that Heaven is *a common Salvation*^t, for all, who love our Lord Jesus Christ in Sincerity. Then they will have all one heart; and a growing benevolence reign in every pious breast; then they will feel it an addition to their happiness to see others happy.—Nothing remains but

The Application

Of this subject to some practical uses of life and religion.

i.... From the subject, we have been considering, we may learn something of *the present state and designation of a Christian.* Unless we attend to this, and fix in our minds some general view and design of life, we shall grope like men in the dark, and use the next means, that come to hand, without considering their fitness and proper tendency. Hence most of our difficulties,

D

^t Jude ver. 3.

ficulties, and disappointments. These reflections seem to rise naturally out of the subject.

I.) *That this world is preparatory to another.* So much we may conclude from the capacity and constitution of human nature, that we were originally designed for an existence beyond this World. Whence those large capacities; that boundless prospect of knowledge and virtue before us; whence that pleasing hope of immortality? Such Beings must be designed for a longer duration, than that which lies between the cradle and the coffin. But if we will notwithstanding, confine our prospects, we shall hope for nothing so much as some present good, and fear nothing so much as some disappointment in our present measures. Those will be the things then, which will engross all our thoughts.

Thou art, *Man*, an immortal Being. Thou wilt live, when thy body is mouldering in the dust; when thy fortune is transferred to new possessors; when the world shall be all in flames, and mortal things no more. Where is our wisdom to settle in transitory things, and make no provision for ourselves in such events? Where our foresight, when we are born to be probationers for Eternity, and candidates for an immortal crown, then to become secure or sinful, and lose our interests in both worlds.

Death may come too soon for us, to convince us of our folly; but perhaps too late to correct it. It must then be our duty to live in the
views

views of another world, that we may regulate our passage to it: to be virtuous and good, for then we should have no consequences to fear, under the disposals of an infinitely wise and good Being.

2.) *There is no getting to heaven without some pains.* We must run, and strive, and exert ourselves for the crown, before we can obtain it. Life is subject to great varieties; here the way is rugged; there a storm blows hard; yonder a steep ascent must be climbed. God saw that such a state was necessary for the discipline and nurture of our faith and virtue: that religion might appear to be the result of our choice; and not the mere effect of education, custom, or fear. In such a state we have need of all our wisdom and fortitude; we have reason to secure the aids of divine grace; that we might preserve our integrity; and that our virtue, when tried, might not be overthrown.

I know not how it is, we are loth to think of labour and difficulty, though it be in the way to heaven. We would have all privilege and grace, without duty; we would reach the crown without the exercise. But, *my friends,* this is not consistent with the present system of providence. We must labour to attain good, and resist evil: we must exert ourselves to correct the impulses of sense and appetite, and do not think this can be done without some trouble. Every man has his share of difficulty, and I am ready to think, those who have the least,

28 *A good Conscience, &c.*

are the most unhappy ; because they are so much the more in danger of running into indulgence, ease and security.

Deceive not yourselves. We must strive to enter the strait gate ^a; we must work out our Salvation, with a proper concern, with fear and trembling ^w, lest after all we should come short. Never expect a salvation that costs you nothing. You were never sent into the world to amuse yourselves with vanity; never born to live in a rapture: but this is the character of your nativity, and might be easily calculated from universal experience; *you are born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards* ^y. The kingdom of heaven now, as well as formerly, *must be taken by force* ^y; by patience, by self-denial, by mortifying corrupt affections, by cultivating all the virtues of religion. You will find this distasteful to flesh and blood, and that it will engage you in a powerful conflict.

However, this you have for your encouragement, that if you vigorously and sincerely exert yourselves, you will be well supported. You will have God, and your consciences on your side, and then I think, you can desire no greater comfort, and want no better defence. *Fear not, for those that are with us, are more than they, that be against us* ^z.

3.) *That which is the support of a Christian in death must be his honour and glory in life, namely,*

^a Luke xiii. 24.
Mat. xi. 12.

^w Phil. ii. 12.
^x 2 Kings vi. 16.

^z Job v. 7.

ly, the testimony of a good conscience, and the lively hope of divine favour. Death is a very trying circumstance, and will awaken all the reflections of self-interest, and self-concern. Then the deceits of sin and the world will have less power to impose upon us, and we shall be more capable of making a truer judgment of things.

What do men, in that hour, think of the world? They call it a trifle, not worthy the labour of an immortal mind.—What do they think of sin? Ah! this gives them all their uneasiness, and pain.—What is their support? Not their dignity or wisdom; not their friendships or wealth: but a good conscience, and a lively hope.

Our living thoughts and resolutions should be the same as our dying ones. We should never prostitute conscience to popularity, or gain; or sell our integrity to gain a livelihood. Would a man do so, if he was going to die? No—The dying man's abhorrence should be ours; and his wish our choice. If we would act a wise and a just part we ought to be in life, what we ourselves shall wish we had been, when we come to leave the world. Then life would be uniform, and go on with regular and steady motions. We should be honoured in life, and supported in death; our end would be peace, and all consequences in our favour.

4.) *It is nothing done for us, or without us; but something within, that constitutes true religion.* In the gymnastick exercises the contention

tion was personal. There was no running, or wrestling by proxy; no securing the crown by the merits of other combatants. So it is in religion. Our personal holiness and virtue are necessary to Heaven. *Ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life*^a. The moral change, or divine image must be wrought into the very frame of the Soul, or we shall want both a disposition and title to happiness. The carnal biafs must be altered; the corrupt affections subdued; the disease of our nature healed; and all our relishes virtuous, otherwise our Christianity will avail us nothing.

No outward penances; no solemn absolutions; no sacraments, or church upon earth, can give us the hope of heaven, whilst we remain unsanctified. This then must be our resolution to strive, to strive lawfully, i. e. *by such a conversation as becometh the gospel of Christ*^b; and by pursuing such views, as he has called us to, even *virtue and glory*^c. Every other course will bring us into contempt in this world, and into condemnation in the next.

ii. There is another view of the text, that is consolatory. It looks with a kind aspect upon all the friends of religion. The example is illustrious, the end happy.

i.) *It encourages good Christians to live more by faith.* What object so fair and inviting as a crown

^a Rom. vi. 22.

^b Phil. i. 27.

^c 2 Pet. i. 3.

crown of righteousness. We meet with many disagreeable occurrences in life; enough to convince us that our Rest is not and cannot be here, because it is polluted^a; polluted with a mixture both of the evil of sorrow and of sin. Providence designed that we should meet with such proofs of our imperfection, on purpose to raise our thoughts and expectations to another state. Now by your profession you have chosen another treasure. Have not your souls said, with deliberation and solemnity, *the Lord is my portion^b*, and heaven my rest? If so, should not those be eyed often? Should not faith realize, and hope appropriate the object? What have you to do with mud and dirt, who are seeking the stars? View the radiant crown. The day is coming when it will be yours; when it will be as freely given, as freely purchased by the Redeemer. Oh, what comfort might flow from those occasional acts of faith,

Leave others to pursue the flying shadow of happiness; do you secure the substance. Let others derive their consolation from creatures; but you from the wells of salvation. In this you will secure your honour, as well as interest: for be assured, that it is a greater honour to have your names written in the book of life, than in the records of fame: to be rich in faith and good works, than possess the dignity and wealth of a kingdom. *Lazarus* in his poverty and sores may be an object of compassion; but if we follow him to *Abraham's* bosom, we must

must view him with respect and gratulation. *Paul* in his labours and chains may be thrown into a shade ; but see him in the text rejoicing in the nearness and importance of his crown, and who would not exchange his best condition with him. The end crowns the work. When the finishing is glorious, the conduct must be wise and prudent and honourable. Here the end itself is a crown of righteousness, and the conduct guided and supported by a steady faith ; or ought to be so.

2.) *It should unite the hearts of all good Christians more cordially to one another.* Different sentiments and forms may be consistent with integrity and the favour of God ; but enmity, anger, and malice are really destructive to both. Christians are professors of love and peace ; they are related to the same head, interest, and end, and therefore should maintain fellowship of love. They should beware lest some little incidents should make a breach upon their affections, and that grow into a wide, unfriendly, dishonourable distance.

Consider the example in the text, and that will shew you the impropriety of such a conduct. The Apostle is pleased to think, that he is not the only victor to be crowned. He was not so selfish as to apprehend, that his own happiness would be the greater, by having it all to himself. The generous passion glowed in his breast ; warmed and enlarged it, to congratulate the happiness of others. *Which he will give*

the great Support in Death. 33

give not to me only; but to all them also, that love his appearing. An instance of social goodness, that should incline us to love like brethren, and live together, as heirs of the same promises and hopes.

3.) *Here is a thought, that would brighten the dark scenes of death, and reconcile us to a dissolution.* A reluctance at death, so natural to us, results from that powerful dictate of self-love, and self-preservation, which God has implanted in us. We see however, on many occasions, that a love of fame and glory, *for instance,* shall subdue this reluctance, and raise men above their natural fears. But that which gives death, to a considerate mind, its most shocking form, is sin. This revives the impressions of Deity; of a most righteous and holy judge; and this fills us with a fear and dread of future consequences. *The sting of death is sin* ^f.

But if, when we look death in the face, our consciences bare us a good testimony; if our minds are uncorrupt, and there appears no stain upon our integrity, what a noble firmness will it give the mind, and fill us with a divine pleasure, that shall render us superior to our natural fears? An ill conscience subjects a man to a mean cowardice and fear; and causes him to fly at the very phantom of danger: whilst a conscious virtue faces a real danger, and emboldens with resolution, as it approaches. *The wicked*

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^f 1 Cor. xv. 56.

wicked flee when no man pursueth ; but the righteous are bold as a lion *. How much will this be improved by having the consequences of dying happily secured to us ? To be able then to see our interest in God and his covenant : to view the crown, the boundless happiness, as our own, and which we shall shortly possess ; how will it almost tempt us to invite death on ; at least to bid it welcome, as the messenger of peace ; the charm to rest ; the inlet to glory ? Conscious of the divine presence, David could, without dejection, pass through those dismal Shades. *Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil : for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me* ^z.

4.) *The subject affords us certain comfort, under the loss of our good friends.* Nature and friendship may have twisted the bands of affection so closely together, as to make a separation painful : as to render that very thought the more afflictive, which should alleviate our sorrow, viz. their delightful, useful, and desirable society. If we have been so long happy in their friendship, should we not be thankful for the advantage, and think with pleasure, that wherever they are, however disposed of, it must be all well with them ?

We grieve to think they are taken from us. But stay a little—Have they not had their conflicts and their sufferings ; and will you envy them their rest ? *They have fought a good fight, they*

* Prov. xxviii. 1.

^z Psalm xxiii. 4.

they have finished their course; they have kept the faith. They have approved their faithfulness and integrity to God, and shall we think it much, that they are gone to their triumph and crown?

What—shall we thus undervalue their pious labour; reverse their prayers; and wish them not to have attained, what they longed for, and breathed after? If we believe all is well with them, we have reason to acquiesce in their removal; yea rejoice, and follow the ascended saints with our acclamations. How pleasing the thought, that whilst they lived, it was to be useful; and when they died, it was to be happy. *For me to live is Christ and to die is gain^h.*

iii

.... We shall make one use more of the text, which the present providence points out, namely, to improve the death, which occasioned my discoursing upon it. It was the desire of your deceased Pastor, that both his life and death might be useful to you. In my reflections here, I must necessarily consider him in his publick station; and may be allowed to say, what all knew, who were acquainted with him, that he was a person of great faithfulness, and integrity; one heartily concerned to promote the life and power of real religion.—Now from this providence, observe

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i.) That

^b Philip. i. 21.

1.) *That death is inevitable, when God calls.*
None are too busy; too useful, too good or learned to die; but they may be too unprepared. "This death gives me a view of the frailty of human nature; I see what is the end of all men, and I, whom am living, should lay it to heart. A faithful minister of Jesus Christ is dead. How invaluable is the season of grace; how happy an advantage to have the word of reconciliation! I enjoy the most merciful and effectual scheme, that ever the world saw, for promoting truth, virtue, and happiness. Should I not lay hold on the occasion, whilst it continues? This day hath its evening, and those, that would assist me in improving it, are mortal. Should I not then wisely consider my advantages, and secure some benefit from them, before they are quite gone. I must now expect to see a new face in this pulpit, and in a little time other hearers will appear in those seats. Will not such a reflection quicken me in my course?"

'Tis a melancholy thing to be so taken, and engaged by this world, as to forget *that*, into which we are hastning. Sad it is to sleep or sin away our privileges, and then begin to bewise, when life is almost gone. The reflection will be keen, to think we were once happy in such advantages: but it will smart and wound

wound more deeply, to think we might have been happy for ever.

2.) *Though ministers die, the gospel lives.* Blessed be God for this. When the glory of man fades as a flower, *the word of the Lord endureth for ever, and this is the word, that by the gospel is preached unto you*ⁱ. Ministers are men of like passions, and frailty with others; subject to the same law of death. *We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God*^k. The vessel is brittle and may be broken; but the treasure will not be lost. Ministers may be silent; but the gospel calls; the under-shepherds may be smitten; but Christ the chief shepherd lives. He lives to guide, and provide for his church, and does it with the same tenderness and affection, as when on Earth. Let us prize, *my friends*, the gospel, as a jewel, and assert the free use of it, as our birth-right: but remember we shall do neither to any purpose, till the power of its truths appears both in heart and life.

Our passions are often placed, and indulged absurdly enough. We are apt to fear things, that can do us no hurt; and to grow fond of things, that can do us no good. But here is an object that we cannot affect too much, because it involves in it our best interest; nor fear the abuse or loss of it too much, because it draws after it divine displeasure. In living the gospel, we shall shew a proper regard both to our duty

duty and happiness. It will minister to us light, direction, and comfort; and point out the shortest way to the crown of righteousness.

3.) Your Minister now having finished his course, and labours amongst you, it is a proper time for a little recollection; *to consider your moral state, and how he has left you God-ward.* — There are *two sorts* of persons, who are concerned to make a right use of this providence.

First, Those who have received any *benefit from his ministry.* You, that have been animated and warmed in your Christian course; who have felt the refreshings of heavenly light, and been enabled to taste and see that the Lord is gracious; you should be thankful to God, that he sent an instrument to confirm your faith and piety. You, that have been awakened and convinced of your sin; you that have been reclaimed to the wisdom of the just, and I rejoice to find that God has, in any measure, owned him this way amongst you; your duty is to *remember how you have received, and heard; and hold fast!*¹ Your race is not yet ended; your warfare is not yet accomplished: go on prosperously in the same course, till you arrive to a more perfect light, and establishment. And may the God of all grace bless the seeds of piety and virtue sown here, by the

¹ Rev. iii. 3.

the hand of my Friend ; and ripen them into a full harvest of glory.

Secondly, Those who are yet *in their sins*, hardened and secure. You have this sad reflection to make under this providence ; that you have lost a faithful guide and monitor, and at a time when there is the greatest danger of your continued security ; for *iniquity abounds and the love of many waxeth cold*^m. Sin formerly had something of shame and reserve, *they that were drunken were drunken in the night*ⁿ. Now it is practised without any disguise or remorse ; and the politest ways invented to waste the conscience, and ruin virtue. Such is the progress that vice has made amongst us of late, that I have been ready to question whether miracles would be sufficient to reclaim us. Men's prejudices may rise to such an height, as to be able to resist this testimony of divine power. *If they will not hear Moses and the prophets, Christ and his Apostles, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead*^o. Perhaps God designs more terrible means of conviction.

O Sinners, think of your danger from the times you live in. One friend more is gone, that would gladly have awakened you out of your security. Think of your hazardous condition ; your dangers increasing, and your helps lessening. Will it have any effect to point out the

^m Mat. xxiv. 12.

ⁿ 1 Thess. v. 7.

* Luke xvi. 31.

40 *A good Conscience, &c.*

the immortal crown to you? And does it not appear worthy of your choice and pursuit?
 " If those, who engaged in *wrestling* and
 " *running*, could severely deny themselves, for
 " the sake of victory; shall not we, under a
 " better instruction, shew our resolution and
 " constancy, for the sake of a nobler prize ?"
 Much of your race is before you; you must now apply vigorously, and without any more delay. The consequences of your neglect will be, an unworthy return to your Saviour; the greatest unkindness that you can possibly shew yourselves, and exposing yourselves at last to the anger of God, which you cannot avoid, nor yet endure ^a. Make haste and delay not to

^P Οἱ μὲν ἄρα νίκης ἔνεκα πάλιν καὶ σφόδρων, καὶ τῶν τοξειῶν,
 ἐτόλμησαν ἀπέχεσθαι. — Οἱ δὲ ημέτεροι πάλιδες ἀδυνατή-
 σσοι καθίερεν, πολὺ καλλίον ^Θ ἔνεκα νίκης.

Plat. de leg. 1. 8.

^a As I was composing this discourse (Feb. 8. about half past 12 *) I felt very sensibly the shock of an earthquake. Our foundation is in the dust, and how easily can that be shaken. This was a sudden and surprising instruction from the natural world, and commands a respectful fear of God; and gratitude too, that what has proved fatal to thousands should be attended with no bad consequences to us. It proceeded no doubt from the operation of natural causes; but natural causes are in the hands of God, and he can make them the instruments of his vengeance upon a sinful world; or warnings of severer judgments in reserve, to punish those, who are incorrigible in their Sins. Our Saviour speaks of *famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places, as the beginning of sorrows*, Matt. xxiv. 7; 8. Plainly intimating, that such events in the natural world,

* Since which a more violent shock was felt March 8, 35 minutes past five in the morning.

to keep his commandments, and you have nothing to fear from his power.

4.) *And lastly*; you will now have another opportunity of shewing your regards to Christ's honour and interests in the world, in the choice of a successor to your deceased pastor. This, *I think*, you ought to look upon as one of the most solemn actions of your lives, in

F which

world, were sometimes intended to foreshew revolutions and changes in the moral world. Good men will make proper reflections on such events, and derive something from them, to nourish their faith, strengthen their hope; and increase their reverence and veneration of God. Sinners too should learn from thence to fear God; his awful majesty, and power. In his hands we are as nothing, who can thus make our foundations totter, in a moment convert our houses into heaps of ruin, and arm the meanest of his creatures against us. Hereafter, can sinners so lightly use his great adorable name; and sport with the terror of plagues and damnation: hereafter, can they mingle with every idle story, the faith, the blood and wounds of his son? Shall nothing sacred escape their imprecating rage? What is this less than to insult and defie the Almighty God; *run upon the thick bosses of his buckler*, Job xv. 26. and dare him to do his worst? See how many convincing proofs there are of his eternal power in the creation, Rom. i. 20. but we have been accustomed so long to those wonderful appearances, that we are unimpressed by them. If God steps out of the usual course of things; if a comet blazes in the air, or an earthquake shakes our dwellings, *the most determined sinners in Zion are afraid*. Their hearts tremble within them, and melt away. The danger over; they return to their old security, profane every awful name, repeat their criminal pleasures; and again provoke, and tempt the unequal war. Would we but preserve our integrity and virtue in the course of our lives, we should stand upon a foundation firmer than the mountains, nor fear the shock of evil tidings, Psalm cxii. 7. A truly good man may, with firmness

which both you and your posterity will be interested. Now will be tried what your prevailing relishes and designs are, whether you are willing to trust God without curiosity, and support his worship without indifference. Now it will appear, what you can do with God by your prayers, and what you will do for God by your interest.

When this affair comes under consideration, you ought in the first place to ask counsel of God. You should conduct your deliberations without

ness, behold the last amazing scenes ; the heavens rolling away in thunder ; earthquakes shaking the very center of the earth ; and hear unmoved the tremendous crack of dissolving worlds.

*Justum et tenacem propositi virum
Non civium ardor prava jubentium,
Non vultus instantis tyranni
Mente quatit solidâ ; neque Auster,*

*Dux inquieti turbidus Adriae :
Neu fulminantis magna Jovis manus.
Si fractus illabatur orbis ;
Impavidum ferient ruinae.*

Hor. Od. III. 3. 1.

He who by principle is sway'd,
In truth and justice still the same ;
Is neither of the crowd afraid,
Though civil broils the state inflame ;
Nor to a haughty Tyrant's frown will stoop,
Nor to a raging storm, when all the winds are up.

Should nature with convulsions shake,
Alarm'd with thunder from above ;
The final doom, and dreadful crack,
Cannot his solid virtue move.

King.

the great Support in Death. 43

without partiality or anger; free from a party spirit, or an affectation of friendship. May God unite and direct you, as he hath hitherto done. I conclude all with the prayer of Moses for his successor. *May the Lord, the God of the Spirits of all flesh, set a man over this congregation, which may go in and out before them. That the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd*[†]. Which God grant of his infinite mercy, through Jesus Christ our Lord
— Amen.

* Numb. xxvii. 16, 17.



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